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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Bureau of Intelligence and Research

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Release

Research Memorandum
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ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS
JANUARY 18-24

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Negotiations. The Soviet press has as yet made no mention of the fact that conversations between Ambassador Thompson and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko have taken place in Moscow. The subject was, however, discussed in at least one public lecture in Moscow and is being extensively noted in the East German press (although without discussion of substance). Soviet reaction as reflected in the lecturer's comments remained carefully noncommittal but did stress that the USSR preferred a negotiated settlement to a separate peace treaty. The matter of an international access authority was cited factually as one of the topics of discussion.

The Soviet press has also avoided reference to the existence of the December 27 aide-memoire to the FRG; however, the memorandum's contents and theme are being increasingly exploited, albeit, side by side with continuing anti-German diatribes geared to the Heusinger note. The Soviet appeal to Bonn may also be reflected in the somewhat more co-operative Soviet handling of German repatriation cases from the USSR in recent weeks and in the relative absence of Soviet attacks against Adenauer of late. (Adenauer's January 17 speech extolling the political implications of the Common Market — a theme generally anathema to the USSR — has elicited no Soviet comment whatever as yet.)

Military Preparations and Demonstrations. Bulgarian and Czech conscripts whose terms of service were extended due to the Berlin emergency are reportedly now being released from their respective units. Polish reservists called up at the same time are to be released in March, by which time new recruits are expected to be sufficiently trained to replace them. Polish units under Warsaw Pact command are reportedly still at full alert status.

The GDR Volkskammer enacted a bill on military conscription at its January 24 session, providing for compulsory military service for 18 to 26 year old male GDR citizens. The time and extent of the implementation of the law was left to the Defense Minister's discretion. The GDR Defense Minister has also called for premilitary training in weaponry, communications and transportation to be given to young men in East Germany by the paramilitary Society for Sport and Technique.

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Soviet tanks withdrew from the vicinity of the Friedrichstrasse sector crossing point the night of January 17-18 following the partial withdrawal of American tanks from the area. At the same time, Soviet military personnel are reportedly more in evidence at the sector border, manning various observation towers along the length of the border.

Neues Deutschland January 20 published the statement of a GDR army corporal to the effect that the East German armed forces on border duty August 13 would have "hit back" with force had the West reacted militarily to the building of the Wall. The corporal specified the NVA would have opened fire on Germans as well as on Americans.

Bloc reporting on the "Long Thrust" exercises continued to be extensive but with a minimum of editorial comment or polemicizing, other than routine references to increasing tension.

Berlin and Germany. No changes in access procedure to or within Berlin have been instituted during the past week. However, the construction of what may prove to be custom sheds at the various sector crossing points into East Berlin continues and additional movable barriers have appeared on the lanes of the Berlin-Helmstedt autobahn in the Babelsberg vicinity.

The new East German customs law (reported earlier) received its first reading at the January 24 session of the GDR Volkskammer. In its official justification of the new legislation, the GDR Council of Ministers accused the West German Government of illegally asserting claims of sovereignty — through the FRG custom regulations of January 1, 1962 — with respect to "the GDR and West Berlin as well as to territories of Poland, the USSR and the French Republic." The GDR statement asserted that West Berlin lies within the customs and sovereign territory of the GDR and is not a part of the Federal customs area, and that the GDR sees itself compelled to initiate "custom duties" which "correspond to the actual situation in Germany."

In the wake of the smallpox outbreak in Europe, GDR authorities were reported to be considering demanding vaccination certification from all citizens of the FRG and of other epidemic areas for travel within the GDR or to Berlin. Czechoslovak authorities have already instituted such demands on a temporary basis for FRG citizens entering Czechoslovakia.

Both the GDR and Moscow media have termed Chancellor Adenauer's impending visit to West Berlin January 25 a provocation and one involving "misuse of the air corridors" by the American authorities who are providing him with air transportation.

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ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET POSITION

The USSR still appears content to permit preliminary negotiations to develop at a leisurely pace. The statements of the Moscow lecturer indicate that the international access authority proposal is still under consideration by the Soviets.

There are no indications the USSR intends to revive at the moment the threat of a separate peace treaty. There are some signs which could be interpreted as meaning that the Soviets will de-emphasize this threat for some time.

Despite evident GDR disapproval of the tactic, the USSR apparently intends to continue its efforts to woo the FRG, at least for the time being.

The removal of Soviet tanks from the Berlin sector border and the increased Soviet military presence in the border area appear designed both to reduce tension and to establish direct Soviet control over the sector border vicinity. The demonstrative Soviet presence is probably intended primarily to discourage incidents developing in the area; at the same time, it could be utilized to backstop any further control measures the GDR may impose on sector entry.

The East German customs law will, if implemented, provide the GDR regime with a "legal" basis for interference with FRG goods traffic transiting the GDR. However, decisive moves against FRG-West Berlin traffic will probably not be taken before the conclusion of a peace treaty or a formal settlement on Berlin. It is of interest that the bill only underwent a first reading (two are required) at the Volkskammer session. The draft had already been approved by the GDR Council of Ministers December 14 and could easily have been enacted at one session of the parliament (as was the conscription law). Evidently enactment of the new law is to be postponed for an indefinite period, possibly on orders from Moscow to avoid interference with the progress of the Thompson-Gromyko talks.

There is some evidence that the customs law is only one of a series of planned East German moves, preparations for which have been underway for some time, but which are now being held in abeyance, possibly in the interests of maintaining an atmosphere conducive to diplomatic negotiations. However, the East German measures could be implemented quickly to increase tension in Berlin should the Moscow talks result in an impasse.

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